



Approach Each Day with Wonder, Joy, & Amazement

By Deb Schein – Growing Wonder

Today, I asked myself, "How might I support children and their families during these unusual times?" My mind quickly went to these Hebrew words: *Pokeach Evrim* (Open up your eyes).

I was introduced to this term by an early childhood educator in Israel who had a very special school for young children. It was not so much what was in the school but more about the way one felt when walking into the space. There was a sense of calm and the space seemed refreshingly uncluttered. People spoke softly and made clear eye contact with one another. There was a feeling of love and acceptance in this space along with sunlight, plants, and color.

The children were young, perhaps two to two-and-half. After the children arrived each day, they gathered into a group for a short *tefillah* (*morning prayer*) service. At one point the children were asked to close their eyes while their teacher described some of the things in and around the classroom. The teacher's words made the children smile. She described how the flowers in the classroom flower pot were beginning to bloom. She told the children that she had placed a new color of paint at the easel. Then she asked them to place their fisted hands in front of their eyes and shout... "*Pokeach Evrim*" as they opened their eyes to their beautiful yet simple classroom environment.

This brings to mind for me, something we can each do today while we are living under our self-imposed social distancing. **We can remind ourselves and our families about the wonders that surround us daily.** Today during a walk in the park, I observed a young child with her father as they stood silently watching small birds dart in and around a bridge that crossed the creek. On this same walk, I noticed how the sun was playing off the water, making shining white dots along the edge. Wherever one lives, beauty can be found.

Here is the important point: **Beauty can lead to moments of wonder that can fill us spiritually.** This bundle of wonder and spirituality can help our immune system and our state of mind.

Let's look more deeply at the power of wonder.

- As a noun, the word **wonder** references a feeling of surprise mingled with approval, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or mysterious
- As a verb, the word **wonder** reflects desire or curiosity about something of interest. It provokes us to reach out, touch, to do
- Synonyms for **wonder** – miracle, marvel, sensation, surprise
- Words associated with **wonder** – joy, awe, amazement

Joy is a feeling of great pleasure and happiness sometimes bringing us moments of gladness, exhilaration, enjoyment. Psychologist might suggest that these feelings open our inner selves up to possibilities and required flexibility needed for flow in our lives that is so needed today!

Awe is similar to wonder only with a touch of fear, and amazement. Research on awe has documented a clear relationship between feeling awe and prosocial behavior. When one is in a state of awe, one no longer thinks about oneself but rather what is occurring. Awe makes one feel part of something larger than self and being in nature helps us to feel this. I am hoping that seeing pictures of nature can have the same effect on all of us. I know pictures produce a powerful internal response in me.

Finally, **amazement**. Maybe amazement is an integration of wonder and awe thus producing openness, flow and prosocial behavior. Abraham Joshua Heschel spoke about radical amazement. Just maybe this is what he was alluding to.

No matter what feelings of wonder, joy, and amazement actually do for us, we can all agree that we need to feel them daily in order to live a healthy, happy life.

This brings me back to ***pokeach evrim*** – open up your eyes daily. And then when you find those moments that help you to feel wonder, joy, and amazement; extend them by adding a blessing or a statement of gratitude. Collect these moments by writing them down or take a photo, draw a picture, mold with clay so you can revisit them. Share them with your family.

Here are three nature blessings you can use daily as you open your eyes to the world that can help expand upon these important moments for you.

Look out your window. Look at the people you live with. Remember how fortunate you are! Breathe in the wonder, joy, and amazement that will help us all overcome the stark moments we are currently living in.

First Blessing

On seeing large wonders of nature, such as mountains, hills, deserts, seas, long rivers, lightning, and the sky in its purity:



בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, עוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה
בְּרֵאשִׁית.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, oseh maasei v'reishit.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, who makes the works of creation.

Second Blessing

On seeing the small-scale wonders of nature, such as beautiful trees, animals, and people:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שְׂכַחָה לּוּ בְּעוֹלָמוֹ.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, shekacha lo beolamo.



We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, that such as these are in Your world.



Third Blessing

A blessing from the heart where you create your own words and thoughts for a special moment.